Memo on ESF application 2007.

Everybody,

As I cannot come to Philadelphia, I have been trying to put together some thoughts on how we could proceed with a common ESF application, drawing upon our meeting in Nicosia and email exchanges afterwards.

Just to repeat the rules around these applications:
(you can take a look at:
http://www.esf.org/esf_article.php?language=0&domain=5&activity=7&article=444&page=1177)

Each application must consist of a common introduction max 2500 words and additional 1500 words for each subproject. Then of course there are many forms to fill in addition though it generally looks fairly non-bureaucratic.

The procedure is a little bit special as we hand in a common application which is reviewed as one (3 reviewers). The different subprojects then go the national research councils - to the one where the leader of each subproject belongs - which make their own decision on funding of the individual projects. This is important as it implies that some of the subprojects can be funded and others not.

My impression from talking to the Danish council was that they were normally supportive of projects which were part of an application which had been positively reviewed, but there were no guarantee. In case of a negative review, funding was quite unlikely.

There is no max to the number of subprojects, but there is a minimum since at least three subprojects have to get funded, otherwise the entire thing is rejected, so we need 5 to 6 subprojects. Each national funding agency can only support one subproject pr. application.

It is important that there is no central funding. Each subproject has its budget and deals with its own national funding agency. They stress that it is a good idea to have funds for conferences etc within the network of the subprojects, but the money has to come from the subprojects.

This also means that the person in charge of each subproject has to check with the relevant research council in terms of their policies with regard to size of budgets, the importance of having post-docs and Ph.D. students involved etc.

This year deadline was April 28 this year. I was told that they expect approximately the same date next tear.

Implications of this are the following

1) Everyone involved has alone or together with a few others to take responsibility for a subproject. Besides formulating the subproject, this means responsibility for the budget tied to the subproject and all forms that need to be filled in
2) What we need to do in common through the introduction is to show that the subprojects are connected and really benefit from each other.

How could we set up a process to make the application?

1. There has to be a "research leader" of the project. The role of this person is to hand in the application to the ESF and the person has to be responsible for one of the subprojects. As there is no central money, there are no resources attached to this person. I am willing to take this position, but if anyone else is interested, I would be happy no to do it. Below I have tried to sketch how we could organize the work with the application.
2. The first step is probably to agree and some broad outline of the introduction. We need a general framework which is well-connected to the sub-projects otherwise we will not be successful.
3. Many people have expressed interest in participating, but no later than December 1, we need a commitment from people. Project leaders for all subprojects have to come from an ESF

member country (all European countries are members). People have to have a fairly precise idea of the content of their sub-project.

1) We then have to work on integrating the introduction and the subprojects. I think it would be a good idea to set a meeting in January/February to discuss this.

Suggestions for overall themes:

My idea is to frame as a question of "understanding changes in West-European politics and policy making"

It is fairly easy based on existing research to argue that West European politics used to be characterized by features like class voting, mass parties with a clear left-right divide, politics related to the nation state and predictable patterns of policy making. The changes to West European politics are many such as

1) Increased electoral volatility
2) Decline of party membership
3) Medialization of politics
4) The growing importance of the EU
5) Globalization bringing advanced industrialized countries closer together
6) Devolutions process in some countries
7) New political issues like bio-technology which do not fit the left-right dimension easily.

All this has been studied intensively, but rarely from an agenda setting perspective. I think we can make an argument why many of these changes have made an agenda setting perspective highly relevant for understanding contemporary policy making: For instance.

1) The are more political venues (EU etc)
2) The political agenda is less pre given as about left-right issues.
3) Mass media and their attention focus seems of increasing relevance

My hope is that an introduction along something like these lines would on the one hand allow people to pursue quite diverse research interests, but at the same be united by a common theoretical perspective, a common methodology, and contribute to an understanding of how policy making works today and how it has changed. We would for instance be able to say something the extent to which policy agendas have become more alike due to globalization, EU etc, the extent to which new policy problems are handled differently or similarly across countries, whether policy decisions become more chaotic and more driven by short term media attention

These are just ideas. The important thing is that we get coherence into it.

I have one worry which Sebastian has also pointed to. We could have two types of potential projects. One is country projects which basically aim at data collection in a country. The other type is projects driven by a substantial question cutting across countries – how countries respond to bio-technology for instance. The problem as I see it is that it might be difficult to get the first type of projects through. On the other hand, several people are trying to raise funds for exactly the first type of projects. Maybe we can have a combination of the two types of projects, but this also depends on whether the people currently trying to raise funds are actually successful.

An option might be to wait another year so we could hopefully base the application on existing data in a number of countries. Still, it takes 6 to 8 months to get a decision on the application, so this then becomes really a long-term project.

All the best

Christoffer